

RCKY

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RCKY

Dare, Romeo, Dutch, Micky and I huddled together in the back of the hanger. out of earshot from the rookie.

"Alright, does everyone know why we're all here?" Dare asked us. Romeo, Dutch and I all nodded. Mickey shook his head. We gave him a dirty look and Dutch slapped him on the back of his head.

"Ow! I don't! I don't!" he whined, rubbing the spot where Dutch hit him.

"It's about the rookie, idiot." Dutch growled. Mickey started playing around with his dog tags.

"Why? What's wrong with Ricky?" he asked, all innocent-like and worried. Mickey really made you wanna punch a wall sometimes. He was an explosives genius, but he was an idiot in every other department.

"What? So you haven't noticed that Ricky hasn't said one word since we first met him?" I asked him, crossing my arms.

"Yes I have! I just assumed that he wasâ€¦.I don't know, shy or somethingâ€¦." Mickey shifted his weight uncomfortably from one foot to the other.

"Ricky being the, 'strong-silent' type isn't the only problem, either." Dare chimed in. She was leaning against a stack of crates. She glanced at me, then looked at Dutch and Romeo.

"I don't think any of us have seen his face."

It was like a bombshell was dropped in the middle of us. We all exchanged nervous glances.

I tried to focus on a time where I might've seen Ricky's face. I never remembered him being in the cafeteria during meals. Never in the mornings, when all the guys took showers, or during those mandatory medical exams. Hell, we all slept in the same_ wing_ and I never remembered seeing him in his bunk. It was like he was a ghost, not there at all.

"Freaky," Dutch muttered, sitting down on the floor.

"Plus how and the Engineer have been practically inseparable since we got here. That smelly thing follows him everywhere." Romeo added. He was sitting on a crate, clutching his chest. You would think a punctured lung would keep a guy down, but not Romeo.

Mickey was taking apart his pistol when he spoke.

"Maybe he's a mute?" he said, occupied with reattaching the top of the chamber.

"A mute?" Dutch boomed, which made me and everyone jump and made Mickey drop his half-repaired gun. Dutch covered his mouth with his hand and we all turned simultaneously to look at Ricky. He was making these weird, awkward movements with his arms. I could hear the Engineer's gleeful squeals from across the hanger. My heart-beat returned to normal and we all stared at Dutch with wide eyes.

"Do they even let mutes in the army?" Dutch asked, hushed and quiet.

"Right now, I don't think it even matters who's in the army. The UNSC just needs bodies." Dare said, "I know that back before the Human-Covenant war started they couldn't."

"Do ya think he knows sign language?" Mickey asked, holding up a complete pistol.

"I don't know. Does anyone here?"

"I'm sure we could find someone-"

"I do."

All eyes focused on me. The guys cracked smiles, Mickey even snickered. Dare raised a skeptical eyebrow.

"Youâ€|do?" She sounded incredibly doubtful.

"Yeah, I do." I replied in a smart, jerk-ish way, "I wrote a book with a mute character, and let me tell you actions _very_ much speak louder than words."

"You, Gunnery? A writer? No way."

I shrugged my shoulders.

"Fine, don't believe me, but the next time you pick up the _Alexis Beckett_ series, you'll change your minds."

Jaws literally hit the floor. Dare cracked a smile.

"You're the famous C.H. Castle?" she laughed, "No way!"

Inflated by a sense of pride, I spread my arms out in a dramatic way and began reciting a few lines from my most popular book of the series, _Time is Made of Glass._

"Alexis Beckett let the gun slide out of her hand. I clattered to the floor, but the sound was muffled in her ears." I approached Romeo, and got down on one knee in a Shakespearean way.

"_'No.'_ Nathan's lips moved. He found himself running in quicksand. Every light seemed brighter than the last as he made his way to the edge of the Golden Gate Bridge." I skipped a few lines in pompous haste. I had stage fright, to be completely honest. Having all eyes on you can really make a guy sweat.

"Alexis spread her arms wide, the explosive on her chest ticking down. Twenty seconds remained on the dial. Officers were yelling through megaphones, civilians screaming and crying, filming every second with shaking hands-"

"Alright, alright!" Dutch covered his ears. "We get it, you're a writer, just quit it! I'm not that far, so don't spoil it!"

I smiled widely, stood up, and took a bow. Romeo and Mickey started clapping. Dare burst into a fit of giggles. Dutch's face contorted into an embarrassed sneer. Dare cleared her throat, silencing the grinning faces of Romeo and Mickey.

"Alright, Mr. Best-Seller, how much sign-language do you know, exactly?" she asked.

"All of it, actually. I keep a guide in my bunk and read it just to refresh my memory. I have a pretty good memory when I'm really trying to remember something." I said, just to brighten my already peacockish reputation. Dare shook her head in mock disbelief.

"Well, go on Castle, we're not gonna wait around for you to make contact with the rookie forever." Romeo jerked his head over in the direction of Ricky. He was sitting on a metal bench, reading a paperback. The Engineer was on the ground on one side of his legs, its head resting on his thigh.

I waved to the rest of the team, and walked off in Ricky's direction. I made sure my footsteps were loud against the metal floor, just to get his attention. Ricky heard, and looked up at me. Well, I assumed he was looking at me, since he had all his armor on, including his helmet.

I stopped, then brought my hand to my forehead. Just like a military salute, but the thumb is away from the hand.

"Hello." I signed. Ricky dog-eared the page he was on, then closed it and set it to the side. He did this little wave, stroking the

Engineer's head.

"Are you alright?" I signed.

I expected him to start laughing, and then ask me what the hell I was doing. Instead, he signed back his response.

"I'm alright. This book I'm reading is okay" he signed. He seemed a little shocked when I asked him if he was alright. Guess he wasn't expecting any of us to know sign language. He signed fast, too. He must've been mute all his life.

"I could hear you guys talking in the back, y'know."

I found myself rubbing the back of my neck and clearing my throat, shifting awkwardly where I was standing.

"Yeah, sorry about that. We didn't want to hurt your feelings, or for you to think we were conspiring against you."

"The way Dutch shouted 'a mute,' was pretty funny, though."

I grinned in response.

"You're little reenactment was pretty funny, too." he picked up the book he was reading and held it up. The familiar cover of the first book of the Alexis Beckett series caught my eye. I laughed.

"You have a long ways to go, rookie."

"I know, Mr. Best-Seller. I plan on reading all eight of 'em."

He motioned for me to sit on the bench, and we just started an entire conversation. It lasted for an hour, I'm sure. I glanced over at the rest of the team a few times. They were attempting to shield themselves from view behind stacks of crates, but gave themselves away. Ricky had a good sense of humor, too. When he laughed, his shoulders would shake and he would make this quiet wheezing sound. At first, I thought he was having a sort of asthma attack, but he kept signing "That's hilarious," over and over again, which kept my worries aside.

"Hey, why don't you take any of your armor off?" I asked him.

"Because of the Engineer," I suddenly became aware of the putrid odor that came from the blue alien. It hit me like a storm, but I played it off as nothing.

"He's pretty fucking smelly, as you know, and he won't leave me alone, so I thought if I kept my helmet on I would be able to be around him." he continued, "But before you ask, you never see me because he doesn't leave me alone for more than a few minutes at a time. I didn't want to become that 'smelly alien guy' and I didn't want anyone on the ship to hate me for bringing Old Smelly everywhere, so I just fixed myself a little niche in the corner of the cargo bay and I've been there ever since." he looked down at the now awake Engineer. The Engineer moaned in this very low tone, like it was drowsy.

"It must get lonely in there, I bet." I started to feel a little sad for Ricky. Being mute would've been another level of hell for Ricky if anyone else found out. Not all marines were the "don't ask, don't tell" sort of people. Combined with the newly acquired Engineer, he would've been an outcast.

Ricky didn't sign, but his helmet bobbed up and down, his shoulders slumping.

I reached out and pat his shoulder, shaking it a little, in a friendly manner. His head ducked down, and his hands grabbed the sides of his helmet. I kept my hand on his shoulder. His head pulled back, but his helmet stayed in his hands. He had this tan skin, he must've been Spanish or something. His black hair was a military-style crew cut. He had these wide eyes with dark circles under them that were a deep brown. His thin lips were curved into a teeth-baring smile.

I was smiling wider than I realized, and I ruffled his hair. He looked over to the crates, straight at Dare, Micky, Dutch, and Romeo. He waved both of his arms up in the air, like he was signaling a transport vessel. The group looked at each other, waited a few seconds, then began to awkwardly walk over to us.

The group greeted Ricky with smiles and hair ruffles. The Engineer floated about, groaning and squeaking happily. I served as a translator, though I butchered a few of his sentences thanks to the increased level of movement. Ricky became self-conscious during the whole group conversation, but I pushed him to join in more by asking more questions and focusing a lot of attention on him. He didn't seem uncomfortable when we asked him about joining the UNSC, but he seemed a little touchy on the family subject, so we all dropped it.

We must have sat there for hours, talking about everything under the sun, even the most trivial of matters like what our favorite kind of weather was and our favorite teachers in high school.

By the time the dinner bell rung, I found myself growing a little more depressed than usual. I was the last of our team to leave, and when I watched them all walk out of the hanger, I thought of all the happy moments that the Covenant would do anything to destroy.

End
file.